

The View From Afar

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Since our return flights from Israel were canceled and we have spent much more time in this country than we expected, we have been watching the unfolding political drama in the United States. In this country, Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu and his opponent, Benny Gantz, are working day and night to hammer together a unity government. Could one imagine President Trump and Nancy Pelosi being in government together? Sounds crazy, but we have done it before in the United States.

Under the original Constitution, the loser in the presidential election became the vice president. Therefore, Federalists served with anti-Federalists. Jefferson served with Washington and Adams. Eventually, as political parties firmed up in the United States and became dominant, the Constitution was amended so that the president and vice president ran together. No one has suggested that we go back to the old system, and do not expect to see it anytime soon.

During the Civil War, Lincoln famously brought into his cabinet political opponents. It did not work out so well, but it did hold the north together in a titanic struggle with the Confederacy.

During World War I, President Wilson, considered to be a kook by many and who only won the Presidency because of Teddy Roosevelt's weird Bull Moose Party, received the cooperation and support of many opponents. The country was united in sending the doughboys overseas.

Enter World War II. The isolationists steadfastly refused any attempt to prepare the United States military for the impending conflagration in Europe and Asia. After Pearl Harbor, all of the isolationists drifted away and even Charles Lindbergh, a Nazi sympathizer, served loyally in the United States military. All politicians of every stripe came together during World War II.

Korea and Vietnam saw considerable political dissention, especially towards the end of those conflicts. Eisenhower ran on ending the Korean War, and Richard Nixon ran on the proposition that he had a secret plan to terminate the war in Vietnam. His secret plan was simply to leave the country.

One would expect that during the coronavirus, politicians would at least appear to be working together. Not so, insofar as we see it across two oceans. The social media and the well-known networks are having a field day! They probably are selling more media online than ever before. The news is not about the latest development in vaccines or treatment, or even feel-good stories about our first responders. The news is all about whether Trump is horrible or a hero. Press conferences have become boxing matches. The press goes in with an incredible chip on its shoulder, looking to get under the President's skin and irritate him. The Commander in Chief responds with all of the

disdain that he can muster. It is almost beside the point as to who responded more slowly to the evolving crisis, whether it was Republicans or Democrats. What matters now is beating the disease, developing treatments, testing people, and teaching America a whole new way of interfacing so as to prevent the virus from reappearing and killing many more Americans.

When I teach in high schools, colleges and other groups, I always stress the incredible layers of government which we have. The court system alone, we have the 50 states and each state has a county court system. We then have a separate federal court system with anywhere between one and three Federal District Courts per state; 11 Circuit Courts and one United States Supreme Court. We have so many legal systems overlapping one another that it is difficult for the most trained lawyers to have any expertise in all of them.

The same confused crazy quilt way of running our government is seen in every walk of life. Who will issue restrictions and requirements to prevent the spread of disease? Should that be the job of local government, state government, the federal government, or some consortium of states? Politics now have several states banding together so that they can issue their own restrictions or lift their own restrictions, regardless of what the federal government has to say. What ever happened to cooperation by and between government during time of war or national disaster? The answer is that it has evaporated in the fog of war, political war.

Americans are not well-served by the international spectacle we are making of ourselves. Unfortunately, precious time is being lost due to conflicts by and between government agencies and ambitious politicians. It is very important to use the time we have to suppress the disease and not to whittle away precious days with politicians trying to gain the greatest advantage.

We are making fools of ourselves nationally and internationally. How did we ever win World War II? Just imagine, in December of 1941, our Navy and Air Force had been decimated. Between that time and April of 1945, we rallied our nation, united the free world and defeated the horrendous war machine put together by the Germans and the Japanese. The United States did that incredible task with the help of allies, some of whom we hated, like the Soviet Union. Somehow, we managed to work with the Soviet Union, which paid dearly for its efforts in the war, perhaps as many as 50 million Russians died. However, at the end of the War, the Soviet Union rolled into Berlin with twice the number of divisions of the allies.

Somehow, somewhere, we have lost in our political maelstrom the will and ability to work together when we do not like someone. This is not the fault of any one republican or any one democrat. This is the fault of us, the voters, who are easily manipulated into voting for people based upon their novelty or verbal jousting skills, rather than their competency. We seem to turn aside from politicians who would really do us some good by saying they are boring or cannot win an election against a slick rival.

Hopefully, along with many other misconceptions, we can throw out the idea that political unctuousness is good for America. It is not. We should embrace and hopefully will embrace a new level of cooperation unseen since the great battle which brought us victory in World War II.

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